

The Berkshire Eagle



Taking a vacation from work can make a person a happier, better employee - and human - but more than half of Americans leave some vacation time unused at the end of every year.
SHANNON YOUNG

INSIDE THE JOB MARKET

Heather Boulger: Vacation benefits you and your boss

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By Heather Boulger

Are you one of the many American workers with unused vacation time at the end of the year?

If so, you are in good company. There are actually 708 million unclaimed vacation days each year.

According to the U.S. Travel Association, the American worker took an average of 17.2 days of vacation in 2017. But employees that opt not to take their vacation could be doing more harm than good to themselves and to a company.

Research by Harvard Business Review, the U.S. Travel Association, Project time Off and Oxford Economics and experience say taking time off may be the absolute best thing you can do for yourself and your company.

Taking time away from the stresses of work and daily life can improve a person's health, motivation, relationships, job performance and perspective.

There are a number of reasons why people might not want to take time away from work. According to a 2017 survey by Glassdoor, people skip taking time off for:

- Fear of missing out on a promotion.
- Fear of falling behind at work.
- Saving vacation days for a time that never arrives.
- Feeling guilty about spending money on a possibly unaffordable vacation.
- The guilt of leaving others to do their jobs.

Get over those!

Here are some of the most important reasons to use all of your vacation days every year:

Your health is at risk

People with little to no break or downtime are at an increased risk of heart disease, anxiety, depression, or other stress-related illnesses. Choosing to ignore your vacation time will eventually catch up to you and take a toll on your physical, mental and emotional health.

Improved sleep

Rested workers are more focused and more productive and they have more energy at work. You'll reset yourself mentally.

Work-life balance improves

Taking time away from your normal routine helps remind you of your interests and hobbies and what's important to you.

Your happiness is in jeopardy

Vacations make people happy, and as the saying goes, happy workers are productive workers!

Decreased burnout

People who take regular time to relax are less likely to experience burnout, making them more creative and productive. Vacation days help you recharge and re-energize for the year ahead.

Here are some Dos and Don'ts regarding paid vacation time:

Don't work

Although it's tempting to respond to your emails and call into that meeting so you don't get behind, but then you're not on vacation, you're just working from somewhere else.

Do something fun

It's not relaxing if you're not having fun. What's important that you break your routine.

Don't use your vacation days for other obligations

Of course you want to move your child into their dorm room and you want to help out your aging parents, but if you use all of your paid vacation time to do other work, you'll never get that chance you desperately need to relax.

Do use your allotted vacation time

It's part of your compensation. You'd never voluntarily give up a portion of your salary, but that is exactly what you are doing when you don't use vacation time that you have.

Don't go into debt

You don't need a fancy trip to have time off count as vacation. It's better to do a staycation and go to the park than it is to accumulate debt in your attempt to relax.

Bon voyage!

Heather Boulger is the executive director of the MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board in Pittsfield.